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Viewing cable 09BELFAST17, NORTHERN IRELAND POLICE BRIEF CONSULATE ON DISSIDENT KILLING

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09BELFAST17	2009-03-09 18:10	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Consulate Belfast

Appears in these articles:

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND POLICE BRIEF CONSULATE ON DISSIDENT KILLING OF SOLDIERS

REF: A) BELFAST 00014

CLASSIFIED BY: Henry Bisharat, Acting Consul General , US

Consulate Belfast.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The Acting Consul General and Management/Post Security Officer met with Deputy Chief Constable (DCC) Paul Leighton and briefly with Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde on March 9 for a briefing on the security situation following the March 7 the dissident republican attack, which left two soldiers dead. Leighton confirmed that the killings were the work of the Real IRA (RIRA), likely with participation by experienced former members of the Provisional IRA (PIRA). He noted that Sinn Fein was internally divided on how to respond to the attack. While Sinn Fein leaders had condemned, this had taken some time, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) still needed more complete Sinn Fein cooperation with the investigation. Leighton asked that U.S. Administration officials make this point to Sinn Fein leaders visiting for St Patrick's Day. Leighton was also worried about other possible attacks and indicated the dissidents might use the publicity surrounding the March 7 incident as a recruitment tool. He said the policing efforts would have to be stepped up in order to deal more effectively with the situation and the possibility of further violence. In a separate meeting, Orde praised the U.S. administration condemnation of the attack and noted he still planned to travel for St Patrick's Day because he believed it important to let USG officials know about the PSNI's work in building cross community support for policing. END SUMMARY.

PSNI BRIEFING ON DISSIDENT REPUBLICAN ATTACK

¶2. (C) In a meeting at PSNI headquarters March 9, Acting Consul General Bisharat and Management/Post Security Officer Gupta (notetaker) met with Deputy Chief Constable Paul Leighton for a briefing concerning the recent attack on soldiers by dissident republicans (reftel). Leighton indicated that Chief Constable Orde had provided a similar briefing to representatives from all the main political parties. Leighton showed a series of time-lapse photographs from cameras mounted near the entrance to the Masserene Barracks, where the attack took place. The photographs revealed that two cars driven by Dominos Pizza deliverymen had pulled up to the barracks. Five unarmed soldiers in fatigues emerged from the barracks to pick up their orders. At that moment, two gunmen armed with AK-47s drove up in a car and opened fire. They walked towards the soldiers, shooting at them even as they lay on the ground. They returned to the car, but came out again and fired more shots before finally returning to the car, which then sped away. As a result of the shooting, two soldiers were killed, and two soldiers and both pizza delivery men were injured. One soldier, who hid in front of the pizza delivery vehicles, was unhurt. The entire attack lasted only 36 seconds. Police uncovered 62 shell casings, which appear to date from the early 1980s and were likely once property of the Provisional IRA. As soon as the attack started, the only security guard in the nearby guard house immediately pressed an alarm button, but armed soldiers arrived only as the car drove away.

¶3. (C) There was no continuous-video recording of the event, and the resolution of the photographs was not sufficient to indicate the registration number or make or model of the car. The photographs have been sent to laboratories in London for enhancement. Meanwhile, the police have recovered a partially burnt Vauxhall Cavalier that may have been the car used in the shootings. Police speculate that the attackers tried to burn the vehicle in order to obliterate their traces, but parts of the car was only charred and blackened in the process, and the police are hopeful that there may be useful information to be recovered from the vehicle.

ATTACK DONE BY EXPERIENCED KILLERS

¶4. (C) Leighton stated that given the lack of expertise displayed in previous attacks by the RIRA, the degree of slickness and callousness demonstrated in this attack points to

the possibility that more experienced members of the "old-school Provisional IRA" may have been involved. However, previous intelligence on dissident activity gave no indication of the possibility of this attack.

RIRA HAS NO BACKING

15. (C) Leighton estimated RIRA numbers at about 70-80 out of a total of about 200-300 active dissidents in Northern Ireland. The RIRA are seeking new members, and it is possible that the success of this attack will help draw more to their cause. However, the DCC pointed out that the RIRA has no real cause backed by current community support; they only have resentments from a long time ago.

MORE HELP FROM SINN FEIN NEEDED

16. (C) Leighton noted Sinn Fein was slow to condemn the attack; the police had hoped for stronger condemnation from Sinn Fein. The DCC was cognizant of internal dissent within Sinn Fein and that it was difficult for their leaders to provide an immediate, unified response. He pointed out that one of the intentions of such an attack might be to embarrass Sinn Fein, but that Sinn Fein must recognize that their position and interests were closely aligned with those of the police. He added they had no choice now but to cooperate fully with the police. Leighton made a strong pitch for U.S. administration officials who meet with Sinn Fein during St. Patrick's Day to encourage Sinn Fein to cooperate fully with the police investigation.

ATTACK PREMEDITATED/NOT CONNECTED TO SPECIALIST REQUEST

17. (C) Leighton confirmed that given the nature of the planning needed for an attack such as this, the recent news report of Army specialists being asked to help monitor dissident activity could not/not have been a provocation for the attack. These specialists are few in number (less than ten) and are providing only "back-room support."

IMPACT ON DEVOLUTION

18. (C) Leighton pointed out that the devolution of policing and justice to Northern Ireland was hamstrung by lack of funding. One possible outcome of this tragedy, in his view, might be to facilitate the funding needed to accelerate the devolution process. He also noted, however, that if Sinn Fein was perceived as being slow to provide complete cooperation with the investigation, Unionists could use that to express reservations about moving forward on devolution.

CHIEF CONSTABLE ORDE PRAISES U.S. STATEMENT CONDEMNING ATTACK

19. (C) After the meeting with Leighton, Chief Constable Orde requested to see Acting Consul General. Orde deeply appreciated the U.S. Government's condemnation of the attack and statements of support by U.S. politicians, notably Congressman Neal. Orde indicated that he would still travel to Washington for St. Patrick's Day, though only for a shorter period, because he wanted to be sure the U.S. understood the efforts being made to ensure cross-community support for policing.

110. (C) Orde also criticized the BBC for its inaccurate report of his use of a small number of military specialists to help obtain intelligence concerning dissidents. The BBC had inaccurately asserted that military patrols and Chinooks would be used. Orde said he complained directly to Prime Minister Brown that morning about the BBC's unhelpful reports, and that Brown had agreed with him.

